



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0405NC-1 for Pender County Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	5
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Overall, the applicant presents an ambitious plan to build on its work in the four core educational assurance areas, but the plan lacks the necessary specificity to determine the extent to which the approaches will be credible and effective.</p> <p>(1) adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy: The applicant's goals are in line with the North Carolina State's college and career readiness goals and adoption of the Common Core standards.</p> <p>(2) building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals with data about how they can improve instruction; The applicant lacks details on the type and scope of data systems that they would either build or acquire to further their efforts in formative and summative data collection and analysis.</p> <p>(3) recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; The applicant addresses the need to enhance the ability of school-level administrators to recruit and retain effective teachers, but does not address specific programs to empower school-level autonomy for hiring and dismissal decisions.</p> <p>(4) turning around lowest-achieving schools; The STEM initiative provides strategies to engage all students, and achieve common goals; however, it is unclear how this program would target the lowest-performing schools.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant's approach to implementing the reform proposal adequately supports a high-quality LEA-level and school-level implementation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) The selection process named all three traditional high schools and all middle schools in the school district as participants. The district provided sufficient evidence that the participating schools meet the eligibility requirements of the RTT-D competition. (b) The district listed all participating schools in an easy-to-follow chart. (c) All schools appeared in the chart with appropriate and complete numbers of total participating students and educators as well as the respective low income statistics for each school. 		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	7
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The school district proposes their high-quality plan for all middle and high schools except for the already high-performing Early College High School.</p> <p>The plan is likely to help the applicant reach outcome goals. The timeline is well developed for the first two years, and then relies upon ongoing professional development in years 3 and 4. The following serve as challenges to reaching the desired outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The goal of "integrated and informative data systems" in the context of personalized learning environments imply that 		

some type of integrated formative assessment tool is available to teachers in order to assist them in making near real-time instructional decisions based upon the formative student data. Rather, the application speaks only to “analyz[ing] student data on a weekly basis...” by “STEM Coordinators, STEM Teams, and Principals.” While the team approach to data analysis can be insightful for teachers, personalized learning becomes increasingly personal with frequent student data analysis and interventions by individual teachers.

- The plan seems quite ambitious, implementing several initiatives quickly in the first two years. While the district's choice of initiatives are complementary (e.g., project-based learning in small, STEM-based small learning communities, etc.), they may each require ample amounts of professional development for teachers to successfully implement. Taking on so many initiatives in a short period of time may detract from the district's ability to effectively implement them all consistently across schools.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)

10

7

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's vision is likely to result in improved student learning and performance. The applicant addresses the criteria in this section adequately; however, it is difficult to surmise whether or not the STEM initiative will achieve the results due to the aforementioned concerns of many of the programs being implemented the first two years.

·(a) The targeted annual measurable objectives for the summative assessments seem ambitious and achievable, and exceed ESEA targets where targets exist. The district also provides evidence on how they will measure assessments where there are no state goals such as 8th Grade Science and ACT Science Benchmarks.

·(b) It is understandable that the applicant chose to address achievement gaps in two subjects; however, it is unclear why other STEM subjects were not chosen, and why the achievement gap reductions would be isolated to two courses in potentially only two grade levels.

·(c) The goals are adequate; however, “attractive STEM curricula and teaching methods” are likely only a piece of the district's larger plan to address the graduation rate. This section could be strengthened by increased detail regarding programs targeted directly at increasing the graduation rate.

(d) The goals are adequate as they are relevant to the only data available to the applicant.

B. Prior Record of Success and Conditions for Reform (45 total points)

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	2
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>It is difficult to determine what metrics the applicant is considering to qualify their record of success. The state awards and media recognition demonstrate that the applicant is capable of receiving awards, but it would be helpful to see evidence of growth for all schools involved in the application, or some type of district metric that qualifies all schools as improving over the past four years. This section reads as a general overview of best practices, but lacks specific evidence to support the assertion of a “clear” record of success.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	4
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant meets the minimum requirements of this section by stating that teacher salary information is available through a link to the state's salary schedule, and that they district posts budget information on the district's website. The applicant states that school-level expenditures and that they are available to the public upon request. It is unclear how the public would know that this option is available. While school-level expenditures are available to the public by request, it is difficult to ascertain the level of transparency of school-level information since it is not posted publicly.</p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	8
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant demonstrates sufficient autonomy to implement their proposal. The applicant also provides evidence to support</p>		

that they are taking advantage of programs offered by the state to increase opportunities for their students. The applicant mentions that the Pender County STEM program will help them go “above and beyond” the North Carolina Career and College, Ready, Set, Go! Program, but does not define what “above and beyond” means in terms of a measurement or in relation to personalized learning. This application requires increased specificity in defining how their STEM program contributes to student personalized learning in comparison to the state programs.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	6
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(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The school leader, school board, teacher, and business community engagement was strongly supported with letters of support, survey results, and the like. However, it was unclear as to how the student voice was considered in this process beyond the letters of support submitted in the application. This application lacks evidence beyond letters of support that students were consulted in the plan's development.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	2
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(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

It was unclear from the response to this section where the applicant considered their baseline to be with respect to personalized learning environments. The applicant mentioned closing achievement gaps and reiterated areas for growth from previous sections. Therefore, it is difficult to follow the logic behind how the applicant identified gaps and created the plan.

C. Preparing Students for College and Careers (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	6

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

This section was strong in making the case for STEM and its connections to the college and career readiness. STEM certifications for teachers, connections with the business community, goal-setting sessions with ninth graders were all indicative of a comprehensive goal of preparing students for college and careers. It was also strong in addressing cultures, contexts, and perspectives of students with the student groupings, efforts to target historically underserved populations in STEM, and involving a diverse group of community members in the program.

The response lacks greater detail in personalization aspects of the curriculum. It is not clear how students will engage in self-directed learning in an effort to achieve mastery where the students engage in rich content with some mechanism to allow them to excel or remediate as necessary, receiving just-in-time assistance from the teacher. The “personalized sequence of instructional content” was not evident from this response. Also, listing a few useful iPad apps does not provide sufficient evidence of high quality content that is aligned with various standards and requirements. Finally, it is not clear how students and teachers will use technology to gain increased access to formative feedback (e.g., frequently updated individual student data).

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	8
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides evidence to support their efforts to ensure that teachers meet student's academic needs such as weekly data evaluations, team meetings, and the like. The applicant also provides sufficient evidence that North Carolina's teacher evaluation system will assist principals in ensuring that continue to provide adequate instruction for students.

The applicant does not adequately address how principals will be evaluated to ensure that they are providing effective leadership for their teachers.

It is unclear how teachers will adapt content to meet the individual needs of students. The applicant mentions differentiated instruction, but does not address how technology will increase opportunities for differentiation beyond simply mentioning that technology “will enable teachers to personalize learning for all students.” What requires more attention in this response is how technology will assist teachers in increasing differentiation. It is unclear if the acquisition of rich, interactive apps on student iPads that will provide them with pre-test activities, online activities, and post-tests that enable students to advance towards mastery at their own pace; or, will the increased differentiation result from access to a greater selection of web-based content for the students to access on-demand? While the applicant mentions project-based learning among other initiatives, this

section lacks evidence that ties together their 1:1 initiative, formative data collection and presentation, and examples of project participation in project-based learning.

The student's participation in data analysis is not apparent this section. Actionable information is addressed by establishing "STEM teams" who will "analyze student data on a weekly basis." Actionable with today's technology can mean per lesson, per class, per day, or any other time formative data is collected, especially with a 1:1 computing initiative. Weekly data analysis is important, but personalized learning requires more attention to formative data by both the student and their teacher.

The applicant did not address the alignment of content to college-and-career-ready standards, nor the tools to create them other than to mention "apps" in STEM courses.

Through evidence of the teacher and principal evaluations, and the commitment to STEM, there is sufficient evidence that students will receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers and principals.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	10
<p>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant provides ample evidence that they can support personalized learning with their existing and requested staffing. The project director, instructional coaches, and other STEM Initiative-specific staff will further the applicant's ability to accomplish their STEM initiative goals.</p> <p>The applicant describes a high level of autonomy at the participating schools with a "democratic leadership model" that includes "[h]ighly effective principals" and "School Leadership Teams." These teams "advise principals and central office administration" on a host of school-based matters.</p> <p>While students have the opportunity to test out of courses through the TST-1 and TST-2 options, this does not address the individual, daily objectives that combine to define subject mastery and the students' ability to navigate the path towards mastery at their own pace. The applicant mentions formative assessments, but it is unclear how the applicant will tie formative assessment to empowering students to progress towards content mastery at a pace other than the pace of their entire class. For example, in a truly differentiated class, one student could be on a standard associated with chapter 4 in the text while another student could be on a task associated with chapter 1. In traditional classrooms, this is more difficult and less personalized due to the teacher's need to teach a common lesson plan to all students. There is little evidence to support the giant leap necessary to increase student autonomy in course mastery.</p> <p>The applicant addresses adaptability and accessibility through their programmatic approaches to special education and ESL, and highlights the opportunities for increased accessibility through the adaptive technology available in iPads.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	6
<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>(a) The STEM advisory board, STEM coordinators, and 1:1 computing initiative ensure that all stakeholders have access to all relevant content and learning materials. The applicant further addresses Internet access challenges by providing after-hours access to school wireless networks.</p> <p>(b) The applicant provides ample evidence that they will provide technical support to the various stakeholders, paying particular attention to parent accessibility to training.</p> <p>(c) By using an industry standard student information system in combination with the Instructional Improvement system and various Web applications, the applicant will increase student and parent access to relevant student performance data. The application does not address whether or not these data systems support the export of their information in an open data format.</p> <p>(d) The applicant does not address data interoperability in their system selections, and simply lists the various systems in use by the school system.</p>		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	7
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant adequately addresses qualitative aspects of data collection and dissemination. For example, “members of the STEM advisory board will write a report of their data findings from their quarterly meetings.” However, there is little evidence to support the applicant's intentions to collect and publicly report data by tracking incremental progress of their quantitative data measures as specified previously in the application. These results may be more accessible to some community members if they are presented graphically or through other numerical representations.</p> <p>Furthermore, the applicant could provide more detail in how they intend to periodically address ongoing expenditures associated with RTT-D in school board meetings, or posting financial expenditures on an incremental basis on the district website.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	3
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant highlights the district website as the primary external communication tool, and email and periodic meetings as the primary means of internal communication. While periodic meetings are informative, the increased use of technology in the STEM program can provide additional means of communication. For example, social networking, internal blogs, etc. can provide a means of two-way communication among groups of stakeholders. For example, several STEM Coordinators in an online discussion forum can maintain a continuous, archived flow of information alive in between the periodic meetings. Furthermore, school leaders such as principals and the superintendent can peer into these discussions to stay informed with the daily issues.</p> <p>Furthermore, the response does not adequately address the teacher/parent communication that is crucial to successful program implementation. It may be assumed that this is happening, but there will be some need to formalize this level of communication as the district rolls out new programs that affect parent/teacher communication.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	5
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant adequately addresses the required indicators by providing easy-to-follow rationale for selecting the measures, and ample evidence regarding the timeliness of the indicators and how they will review the measures over time.</p>		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	2
<p>(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant will use a database-driven system to track the district's professional development endeavors. This is an excellent means of maintaining careful records of teacher participation in each initiative. What is difficult to understand is how the applicant will link time spent in professional development with student achievement. The applicant states that they will, upon completing a PD session, analyze student achievement data to see if it was worth the expenditure of PD time. Analyzing a causal link between time spent on PD and immediate student achievement may not be possible, particularly if the PD activity is designed to work in tandem with another, yet-to-be-delivered-PD skillset. For example, a professional development session on “how to use an iPad” may alone have nothing to do with student achievement, but in the context of project-based instruction in a 1:1 environment may impact student achievement. The bottom line is that what the applicant proposes as a means of evaluating the success of professional development is not practical after completing each PD session or thematic unit, and most likely not attainable.</p>		

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	9
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant presents a well-thought-out and detailed budget. The applicant clearly differentiates between RTT-D</p>		

expenditures and district fund expenditures. All expenditures seem reasonable and necessary to support the STEM initiative. One potentially significant exclusion could be the licensing fees/purchase/equipment for software to manage, track, and inventory the iPads. While the devices may certainly be configured by hand, studies indicate that successful 1:1 iPad pilots include some type of device management software that makes it easier and safer for students to use the devices inside and outside of the school's network. The cost can be quite sizeable and is typically prone to an annually recurring fee.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	3
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(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant identifies funding sources that can potentially fund all positions created through the RTT-D award except for the position of project director which will no longer be needed. However, the funding sources are the result of "partnership development" and "Academically and Intellectually Gifted funds that the school system has," and "newly allotted positions from the state." With these funding sources currently available to fund the positions, it is unclear how these funds will be spent with RTT-D funds supporting the positions. Furthermore, if the funding sources noted in the application will be otherwise utilized, it is unclear how the district will sustain the personnel brought on by the RTT-D funds. Finally, it is unclear from the application whether or not the "newly allotted positions from the state" are guaranteed or anticipated. There may be legitimate reasons for the identification of these funding sources, but the response lacks adequate detail to support the sustainment of RTT-D funded positions beyond the grant award.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	9

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's plan to provide student support coordinators for all middle and high schools is well-thought-out and comprehensive.

The partnership with many agencies is existing and would be continued by the funding in this grant.

The population-level desired student results are consistent with the performance measures reported in section E3 of this application.

The student support coordinators will use a variety of strategies to coach students towards graduation, with behavior data serving as the growth indicator for success.

Through at-risk student identification, case management, and positive behavior intervention and support, among other services, student support coordinators will contribute to social-emotional health of students, thus creating a healthier learning environment.

The applicant does not adequately address the requirement to routinely assess their progress in implementing its plan to maximize impact and resolve challenges and problems.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has coherently and comprehensively addressed how the Pender STEM Initiative will create learning environments that will increase student achievement and further the district's efforts in preparing students to be college and career ready.

Total	210	119
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Optional Budget Supplement (Scored separately - 15 total points)

	Available	Score
Optional Budget Supplement (Scored separately - 15 total points)	15	7

Optional Budget Supplement Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's optional budget supplement clearly lists and explains all costs associated with hiring six student support coordinators, as well as the training, materials, and travel associated with program implementation.

1. The optional budget supplement references the Competitive Preference Priority section of the application. As such, student support coordinators will identify and at-risk students and develop and promulgate school-wide interventions and support to remove barriers to learning.
2. It appears as though this plan would be implemented in only one LEA, the district applying for this RTT-D grant. There is no evidence in this section to suggest that the student support coordinators would support two or more LEAs.
3. Within the context of supporting one LEA, the student support coordinators would adequately support the development and implementation of the strategies listed in the Competitive Preference Priority section designed to remove student barriers to learning.



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0405NC-2 for Pender County Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	6

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

This proposal advances the STEM preparation of middle and high school students in new small learning communities to be established in the district's middle and high schools. The rationale in the vision is that STEM college and career ready students will be more successful in models that borrow from the success of the county's early college initiative where 98% of students are proficient on NCs state tests.

This is a clear and well described vision.

Lacking from the vision is the vision of the early college to embed rigor, relevance and relationships at the core of reform.

In addition, because this proposal is about middle and high school reform and addressing achievement gaps, it lacks connections to gaps created in Pre-K and K-5 environments, making the vision somewhat unattainable. The best way to close gaps is look systemically across the Pre-K-16 spectrum. Missing from the vision appears to be a focus on literacy gaps that so many students enter middle and high school with and, thus, educators spend inordinate amount of time remediation for what was supposed to be mastered prior.

While the vision proposed is well conceived, it does not appear to transform the education of young children in anticipation of this effort, and in a relatively poor rural county, put the same kinds of efforts in play for each incoming sixth grade class. If there is a separate early childhood and elementary effort underway, it was not referenced.

In addition, prior to Race to the Top and Common Core Standards, the NC proficiency levels were misleading. To obtain a "3" or proficient on state tests in most cases involves students scoring between 45%-55% correct answers on the multiple choice tests. This "low bar" that is currently under revision I realize is hardly a world-class transformational standard.

More impressive would be the data on where graduates of the relatively new early college are landing for college and/or career.

The vision detailed has great potential as part of a larger articulated vision of transformational change and success for all students.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	10
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(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The process for selecting schools is well described...each of the three comprehensive high schools and five middle schools will embed a small learning community.

The data for this section are clear.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	5
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(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Because this proposal requests to build additional staffing in STEM areas (primarily) inside of current schools, the scale-up involves the process of sharing the learning inside the larger schools and vertically to the elementary and Pre-K environments.

The proposal implies that new partnerships with STEM experts, businesses and university partners will be created in year one. Unclear is whether those community and university colleagues were at the table to plan this proposal.

In addition, the scale-up to those non-participating parts of the schools and elementary colleagues involves two components: 1) a focus on literacy gaps (reading, math and information) and 2) content mastery. The roll-out of the Common Core Standards reveals that students will be engaged in higher order curriculum concepts at an earlier age and asked to master those concepts so that the upper grades can really focus on college and career readiness. No mention of this in the plan to improve learning outcomes for all students is addressed.

The review indicates that the plan does not meet the minimum of requirements of a high quality plan.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	6
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(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The goals indicated in this section are related to performance on NC end-of-grade and end-of-course tests. Prior test data is configured in the pre-Common Core era, with marginal standards for proficiency. The connections of proficiency on the current/past state tests to prepare students for college and career readiness is doubtful. In addition to the state tests, the proposal could add measures that will exceed state targets, and in particular specific measures to engage students who enter middle school behind in literacy and mastery to close gaps that are already established. The gaps shared in the data are profound between minority students and white students and students with disabilities and white students. The goals are ambitious, however since this is primarily a STEM initiative at the middle and high level, with little to no mention of literacy issues, the ambitious goals are a bit unrealistic. In addition, the success of the early college as a framework is noteworthy, however, the early college is a group of students whose parents chose in. There is no mention of the parent buy-in here to help transform student motivation and academic success for those students who are behind already.

B. Prior Record of Success and Conditions for Reform (45 total points)

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	12
(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
Pender County Schools have shown growth and improvement in student learning outcomes, in raising student achievement and in high school graduation rates. Performance data is available to students. The district has raised student achievement, graduation rates and had early success in the early college. This proposal is to model the success of the early college in the other schools in the district.		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

These data are public and readily available. There is a high level of transparency in all aspect a-d in this section.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)

10

10

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Pender County is well positioned in the state to implement personalized learning. The state has aligned to Race to the Top, legal and statutory requirements are aligned and the process is set to implement personalized learning environments.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)

10

7

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Key stakeholders inside the system were included in the proposal process by the letters of support and processes described.

The level of support from outside the district is implied in support letters, however it is unclear how much pre-planning with those stakeholders took place and how much specifically they influenced the personalized learning proposal. Letters of support from the university mentioned are not included and there is little evidence that higher ed constituents were part of the planning for this initiative. There is no letter from any potential university partners (there is from the community college partner working with the early college), and the proposal indicates that planning will take place year one. This planning in part should have occurred to ensure the success of the proposal in the development of it.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)

5

2

(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

This initiative focuses on imbedding STEM programs in middle and high schools using the success model of the county's early college.

The specific success strategies imbedded in the early college and their transferability to the other schools is not clear. Therefore, the logic is primarily, we have a successful early college and we will use the small learning environment in other schools around the STEM theme. There is no larger connection to the research on early college's, STEM programs elsewhere in the country, or the specifics of personalization that will occur.

C. Preparing Students for College and Careers (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	10
(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>Personalization as defined in this proposal is project-based learning, inquiry-based projects, STEM courses, technology and more Advancement Placement courses. The rationale for this assumes students entering middle and high school capable of these approaches. Unclear is how students who enter middle or high school behind their classmates in literacy and science/math mastery will be successful. Meetings of STEM teachers and mentors are included in the plan, however, less clear is how teachers will improve their pedagogical and content knowledge. The most important variable in student success is teacher effectiveness and there is less emphasis on this in this section. Therefore, the use of data systems indicated may be misinformed because of the gaps in teacher quality. College and career ready students are dependent of highly effective teachers with new and improved content and pedagogy.</p>		
(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	10
(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The proposal indicates the importance of high quality teachers and principals and imbeds professional development from an "educational agency" that will assist. There is no specific information about how this professional development, how the mentors will be transformational in their own prior background or how the selection of diverse students to participate will occur. This section is vague in specifics about how this proposal is using grounded approaches to redefine teaching and learning. The early college model has assisted the district in seeing results on tests and in getting students into college. The work of the New Schools Projects is mentioned, but no specifics about "how this looks" is included in how teaching and learning will be personalized for all learners as a result of this project.</p>		

The issues of literacy and mastery of students entering middle school and high school behind are not addressed.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	15
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: The district has all appropriate policies in place. The LEA central office, the school calendars and schedules are able to be modified to support this proposal, the opportunities for students to take alternative courses in order to demonstrate mastery in multiple ways is evident. There are multiple learning resources and instructional practices proposed that will enable opportunities for all learners.		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	10
(D)(2) Reviewer Comments: The district has all school infrastructure in place. The district has in place strong systems for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Ensuring that all participating students (b) Ensuring that students, parents, educators, and other stakeholders have appropriate levels of technical support, (c) Using information technology systems that allow parents and students to export their information in an open data format ; and (d) Ensuring that LEAs and schools use interoperable data systems The infrastructure proposed and in place is very well designed. 21st century solutions are embedded. North Carolina's state-wide system enables this transparency and uses of data.		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	8
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: Ongoing and real-time meetings are scheduled to use data to make continuous improvement. The proposal does not include specific continuous improvement strategies for assessing student literacy and achievement gap issues. In addition, no specific strategies are discussed for students who are already above proficiency on state tests and/or who have special needs. The proposal does indicate that results will be publicly communicated.		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	3
(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: There is a good set of data sharing, reflection and adjustments included in this section. However, some of the strategies support annual evaluation rather than continuous assessment. For example, yearly student exhibitions are mentioned. The types of communication and engagement should be transformational and model the best practices in the country. The early college models of communication with internal and external stakeholders are not referenced.		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	3
(E)(3) Reviewer Comments: Multiple measures for middle school and high school teacher and student performance are indicated and all areas of this section are addressed. However, the issues of transformational change in closing gaps for students are not indicated. For		

example, the achievement gaps in schools are primarily literacy and mastery gaps. Data about literacy and mastery of the Common Core Standards curriculum are not mentioned. The use of specific strategies to address subgroup performance is insufficient.

The use of technology (iPads) may require a separate data collection system. There is good research that technology improves engagement, and less data about how it enables learning, mastery of core content and assists in closing achievement gaps.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	1
(E)(4) Reviewer Comments: Real-time adjustments are indicated, such as modifying investments if results are not demonstrated following professional development. The gap between professional development and real results may make the connections of this unreliable. Also, the evaluation of the partnership, the use of technology to personalize learning and other interventions are not mentioned.		

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	5
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: The budget addresses identifies all parts of this section. There is less thoughtful rationale for the kinds of investments included and little evidence of the research-base or examples from other successful districts or initiatives guiding these investments. The assumptions of the success of professional development, a major component of this proposal are not clearly defended, and prior reforms have suffered from professional development that did not assist teachers in working with specific subgroups, minority students, ELL students, students with special needs, gifted students, etc.		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	4
(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: The sustainability model included in the proposal is not specific financially. If the results of this project are to permeate the whole district beyond STEM, there is no plan for using the project results to continue to transform and personalize learning. The major rationale is that PD will be imbedded (with a change of leadership likely in all aspects of the district and in at least 40% of classrooms in the next four years, the plan is lacking specifics about this reality. The economic uncertainty to replace positions with other positions is tenuous.		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	5
Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments: This area is well-described. However, the connection of the needs of those students who are at risk of suspension go further than indicated. Students who are at risk come to middle school and/or high school with chronic absences, a history of violence, a troubled record and are usually years behind in literacy. Their test scores likely indicate lack of mastery and there may have been a retention in the early grades. These students and their success in the small learning community is more complex than in hosting a student support coordinator. The transformational aspect of this initiative is not clear. The budget for this item is for six such student support coordinators. Other schools in the country have employed literacy coaches and para-professionals to over-staff classrooms to attempt to achieve mastery and to personalize learning. This example is included only as an example, that for this section research based or best practice in personalization should be included.		

Absolute Priority 1

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	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Not Met
<p>Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The scaling up of the early college success in the three high schools and the middle schools is a positive initiative. The work to ensure personalization of learning and academic success for all students is limited in the transformational components of this proposal. The proposal does not link to elementary preparation and the achievement gaps students bring with them to the middle and/or high schools. The partnership appears to be standing by to assist, but does not appear to have been fully engaged in understanding the tremendous challenges of rigor and mastery in the Common Core era.</p> <p>And, as new tests emerge that will raise the bar on academic success, it is very likely results will indeed go down as presented to the public. No mention of the multiple implications of the journey of transformational changes was included.</p>		

Total	210	137
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Optional Budget Supplement (Scored separately - 15 total points)

	Available	Score
Optional Budget Supplement (Scored separately - 15 total points)	15	8
<p>Optional Budget Supplement Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Six student support coordinators are included in the budget to work on student interventions. The comments in that section prior reveal that this work will allow more community outreach for students in academic and personal risk, however, this model is not justified by evidence that student learning improves and or teaching and learning is transformed. In addition, the connections to literacy and mastery are not included.</p>		



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0405NC-3 for Pender County Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	7
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>There were many things in this application that are admirable in regards to this criteria. The LEA has adopted a teacher and evaluation system, the state has a strong commitment to college/career goals and the LEA has good assessments in place for tracking progress on these goals in math and science. However, the application did not articulate very clearly the specifics about how many of the required goals put forth in the RFP would be met. For example, there are not specific details about the teacher/student evaluation system, nor how it is determined that a teacher or principal is "effective," which makes it difficult to</p>		

interpret the goals about having more students being taught by effective teachers and principals. It appears that the definition might be related to content knowledge, as the proposed project will have more teachers STEM and AP certified. However, simply becoming more knowledgeable about content is not synonymous with effective teaching and leading (although it can be a definite contributing factor). As a second example, there is not very many details in the application about the data system that the LEA plans to use. Reference is made to teachers utilizing student data in their STEM teams, but we are not told what data this is, how it will be collected, and how it will be analyzed. These specifics are important to having a plan that can be effective. The proposal also doesn't indicate whether they have individual teacher identifiers, matched with students, which was part of the core educational assurance areas. There are also not many details about how they will personalize learning for students other than having the learning communities focus on different kinds of projects, and counselors recommending different kinds of internships to students. These ideas are excellent, but we lack details on how this will actually be implemented, and what other efforts will be made to truly personalize the learning to each child. In fact, there are few details at all about how these learning communities will be organized and run, and how they will be different from what has been attempted in the past, including what is meant by project-based curricula.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	8
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(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The application is clear about which schools will participate, and how many students, and it appears to meet the selection criteria. A strong point of the application is the success of the Early College High School, which serves as a roadmap for scaling up this reform, and how well the efforts appear to be integrated across the district and the state. This would appear to indicate the possibility for successful implementation, because of these strong connections and previous blueprints.

However, what is missing is more specific details about implementation at the school level, particularly with the learning communities and the new proposed project-based curriculum. For example, we lack details on how these communities would be organized, administered, and whether the instruction would be the same or different. Not enough detail is provided to clearly understand what the real differences would be for personalizing the learning for students.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	8
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(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant describes how energy and money will be diverted to creating vertical alignment and planning teams for feeder schools that will feed into the high schools, creating a better opportunity for reform for all of the schools in the district. In addition, because they are scaling up a model that has already been shown to be successful (the Early College High School), it is likely that this can be successful, especially in light of the integration with state efforts already under way. The applicant has offered suggestions for continuing the program post-funding, although there could be more details here as well. The applicant provides a logic model, but it lacks details in the activities stage to specifically show what activities will be carried out, so that we can judge if these would likely have the intended effects. Overall, the applicant has a high quality plan describing in most areas the deliverables, parties responsible, key goals, and activities to achieve these goals.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	9
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(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has good summative assessments in place for tracking college readiness, although there are some concerns about how well the data from the EXPLORE assessment will compare with the Readistep assessment. Because these are different assessments, this may introduce error in attempting to extrapolate from the baseline data. The applicant has for the most part set up ambitious yet achievable goals that progressively move more students towards college readiness. However, in some cases, it was not clear why some goals followed steeper trajectories than others. For example, in section A.4.a., it is not clear why Hispanics and White students start out about the same, and yet the goal is for the Hispanics to improve by 4%, and for the White students to improve by 1.5% These incongruencies are infrequent, but showed up on occasion, indicating a lack of logical thinking about the goals.

A strong point of the application are goals for students attending college, and tracking attainment of these goals with a new data collection survey.

B. Prior Record of Success and Conditions for Reform (45 total points)

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	5

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments: The applicant bases all evidence of past success on the Early Career High School, which has been truly a remarkable success with high achievements. This is important since the proposed project seeks to scale up the lessons learned from ECHS. However, what is lacking is data from the past four years showing trends not only in the Early Career High School, but also in all of the other schools, to give an indication of the LEA's ability to sustain improvements across schools. The only data provided is one year of baseline data, but nothing from previous years. Without this data, it is difficult to judge how successful this LEA has been in improving student learning outcomes and closing achievement gaps. The application is also missing information on how they make student performance data available to parents and educators (although there is discussion about transparency with regards to budgets) and how they have achieved ambitious reforms in low achieving schools.		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5
(B)(2) Reviewer Comments: The LEA has a history of making budget and salary information public on its website. A salary schedule for teachers is available on the NC Dept. of Public Instruction's website, and all school board minutes are available on the PCHS website. Links to the salary schedule and the yearly budget for the district are also available on the PCHS website.		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	10
(B)(3) Reviewer Comments: The application shows how the goals of this project align well with state reform efforts, which indicate a high likelihood of sufficient autonomy for implementing the proposal.		
(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	7
(B)(4) Reviewer Comments: The LEA collected data from teachers and found a high number (over 90%) in support. The teachers appeared to have been involved, via this survey, in determining what technologies and efforts would be included in the proposal. There are also letters of support from state and corporate partners. What appears to be missing are letters of support and descriptions of involvement for those agencies providing the critical professional development to the teachers and schools. Thus, there are still no details about the nature of this professional development or the qualifications of who will provide it. The applicant indicates they will have an appropriate bidding process, but regardless the lack of intended support from agencies who might be contracted to provide the training means the estimated quality of the training is unknown at this time.		
(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	3
(B)(5) Reviewer Comments: The applicant identifies technological needs as well as the need for more 21st Century pedagogies, but is light on details about what exactly needs to change in order to successfully implement strong personalized learning environments. The logic behind the proposal is thus not adequate, as there are not details about the specific activities and inputs that would assume to create the desired effects, along with the logic for why these activities would be expected to create these effects.		

C. Preparing Students for College and Careers (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	10
(C)(1) Reviewer Comments: The applicant has articulated a vision that broadly speaking could be successful, by proposing reorganizing students into learning communities of about 200 students, forming STEM teams of teachers that will review student progress reports, and implement more choices in classes (with higher amount of AP and college courses) and internships (chosen in consultation with students and mentors). The applicant plans to hire mentors to work with students in achieving these goals. However, what is missing are details on how this broad vision will be implemented. For example, it is not clear how the learning communities would work, how the instruction would be different, what is meant by project-based instructional		

approaches (this term is broad and can be used to define almost anything), how students would know their progress, what kinds of formative data collection and analysis processes will be in place, how that data would be communicated to parents and students, and how the critical skills of teamwork, critical thinking, creativity and problem solving would be taught in ways that are different from what has been done in the past.

Also, it appears that the efforts to personalize learning will be on the level of offering more course and internship options, but the application does not discuss how exactly instruction will be personalized to the needs of individual students. In addition, how the use of technology (the iPads) for accomplishing these higher goals is not discussed, beyond description of a few science apps.

Information is not provided on how students would be trained and supported in using the personalized learning tools and resources. The applicant mentions assigning a mentor teacher to each student to create their personalized learning plans, but it does not address training on the tools and resources.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	10
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

As discussed previously, the deficiency in the proposal was the lack of concrete details. For example, it is not clear how the learning would be personalized by adapting content and instruction, not just by providing additional course options, nor how the teacher/principal evaluation systems would inform and guide improvement (since there were no details about how exactly they would be evaluated). There was also not very many details about how schools would improve their training and practices other than to indicate that this would be the job of the Project Director. This raises the question and concern of how the LEA would know that the training and practices implemented are working, besides the outcomes on summative assessments. For example, there were no details on formative assessments in place to be more responsive to needs and issues much sooner.

Additionally, the applicant mentions needing to provide teacher training, and that it will contract this out, but the applicant does not discuss what kinds of professional development specifically it will provide, nor the qualifications and quality of the trainers that will provide it. The use of STEM teams to analyze data is mentioned and that training may be provided to them, but it is not clear how exactly these teams will support teachers in understanding how to be more effective teachers. Reference is made to value-added assessment software that can provide data on the effectiveness of teachers and evaluators, but not necessarily how this data will be used to improve teacher and leader effectiveness.

There is no mention of specific plans for increasing the number of students being taught by highly effective teachers and principals other than to suggest that implementing the ipad-based personalized learning proposal will result in this naturally.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	6

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant describes the LEA organization including the proposal to hire instructional coaches to assist teachers with implementation of the project, and the role of STEM coordinators in the schools who will serve as administrators for the small teacher learning communities. However, it is unknown what kinds of control the school leadership teams will have over schedules, calendars, budgets, staffing, and instruction, and how students will demonstrate mastery. The application discusses the learning communities, but it is not clear how this will be different in actual practice from previous instructional models in the areas of mastery-based learning, and personal adaptation/instruction. The applicant discusses how iPads can provide greater accessibility to disadvantaged students, but without details and specific examples. Also, there is no discussion about how students could demonstrate mastery at multiple times, other than on different end-of-year summative assessments.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	2
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(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

There is no discussion in the application about technology infrastructures for data management and exporting the data in ways that can accompany the students into others systems, nor how parents and students would be trained on this data technology. The applicant does propose training for educators on the use of the iPads and discusses that they will use (and assumedly know how to use) data on student progress in their team meetings. The application discusses online courses that could be offered to students, but it is not clear if these or other learning resources will be made available to all regardless of income or whether they are enrolled in particular classes. For example, if a student is not in an online class, but in a regular one, it is

not clear if he/she could have access to online materials to support learning.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	4
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has a strong history of public transparency in regards to budget and other decisions. In addition, the applicant indicates the Project Director will oversee continuous improvement. However, there are no details on how continuous improvement will be measured (outside of the end goals on end of semester tests and college enrollment rates) and how data about training and other initiatives in the proposal will be improved based on formative data.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	4
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has strong current support from stakeholders, but does not articulate a clear plan for continuing this collaboration in the future. Mention is made of a community schools director who serves as a liason with the community, but it is not always clear what this director does or will do to provide ongoing engagement with stakeholders and this project. The applicant has said that the Project Director will be responsible for "ensuring" ongoing communication, and has some specific ideas for doing so, including quarterly meetings with STEM advisory boards and a STEM open house to showcase student achievements to the community. Specific details about how the stakeholders would collaborate on the continued implementation and development of the proposed reforms is not clear.</p> <p>More effective is the plan and the specific details given for how the STEM coordinator at each school will coordinate with the STEM team, holding weekly progress meetings on student progress and reporting to the principal and central office.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	4
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has many proposed data points, and has articulated goals and plans for reviewing data annually. However, there is no discussion about how to review the effectiveness of the assessments and how to improve them over time. This is important particularly since they are piloting a new survey on college enrollment as well as a change from the Readistep to the EXPLORE assessments, so care for monitoring the quality of these assessments is important, but missing. This is a small misstep, and the overall plan for performance measures is strong as the applicant uses a mix of traditional standardized assessments, which should be solid and reliable, as well as new ideas for collecting data on college success.</p>		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	0
<p>(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The application does not articulate plans for evaluating professional development, technology usage, quality of implementation of the new project-based pedagogies, and the effectiveness of the various learning community organizations.</p>		

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	10
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has articulated clearly how the budget funds will be used, including which funds will come from other sources, and plans for building infrastructure for the future. The applicant has identified how the funds will be used to support the implementation of the project and described the purpose and use of these funds, along with which funds will need to be sustained. The majority of funds will be to purchase the ipads and hire the personnel that will be key for instituting the 1:1 personalized learning initiative. The applicant will use a train the trainers model to enhance sustainability after the project's end.</p>		

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	6
(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: The applicant discusses additional sources of revenue from community partners (although this is not described in detail) and Academically and Intellectually Gifted funds that can be used to sustain the project after the grant. However, there is no discussion about funding for replacing the iPads, nor how they will determine whether positions should be eliminated or not after the grant ends, nor how the use of the AIG funds will affect the AIG population.		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	8
Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments: The applicant describes a multi-agency partnership geared towards improving social behaviors and decreasing aggression among students. Strategies include placing student support coordinators in the schools and providing training that is evidence-based for improving youth relationships, and decreasing aggression and truancy. The applicant identifies decreased acts of aggression as the performance to be measured. Missing is how the applicant will use the "excellent pre and post testing" already included in the Safe Dates program as another measure. Also, while describing the programs as evidence and research-based, there is no discussion of the evidence or research. Finally, the goals for decreasing acts of aggression do not seem to be very ambitious (decreasing aggressive episodes by Blacks by only three over 5 years, and by five for White students over 5 years).		

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met
Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments: The applicant appears to meet absolute priority and has a strong connection to college goals, teacher training, and an emphasis on student learning, but lacks details on how specifically this priority will be accomplished in terms of actual activities and personalized learning resources.		

Total	210	126
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Optional Budget Supplement (Scored separately - 15 total points)

	Available	Score
Optional Budget Supplement (Scored separately - 15 total points)	15	10
Optional Budget Supplement Reviewer Comments: The applicant has proposed a reasonable expenditure for aiding its efforts to decrease student aggression and improve student behaviors. This plan is further discussed under the Competitive Preference section. The applicant proposes implementing Project Venture and Safe Dates programs as a way to decrease student aggression and poor behavior. The applicant has articulated goals for gauging the effectiveness of the programs. In this optional budget, the applicant requests additional funds to hire student support coordinators and curriculum materials to expand the program. However, the applicant does not explain exactly how many more students will be served by this expansion of the program, and what adjustments to their goals already stated in the Competitive Preference section would be made.		

